Would **as a hedging device in an Irish context: an intra-varietal comparison of institutionalised spoken interaction.**

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Introduction

Hedging is an interactional strategy that speakers and writers avail of in communication, and they do so in a variety of ways and for different reasons. The purpose of this study is to look at one hedging device in two institutional settings of face-to-face spoken interaction in Irish settings. Hedging is borne out of its conditions of use, its context, which extends beyond the institutional setting to the society which initially institutionalised these interactions. We have chosen to look at the modal verb *would* as a hedging device in the following institutionalised settings in Irish society: (1) radio phone in on national Irish radio (henceforth RPI), and (2) post-observation teacher training interaction in an Irish university as part of a post graduate teacher training programme (hereafter POTTI). For the purposes of our analysis, we will use two corpora of transcribed data from these settings. In doing so, we aim to build on the sentiments of Clemen (1997: 235) and show that hedging is achieved primarily by setting utterance in context rather than by straightforward statement. Indeed it is our contention that 'context' should be extended to levels that allow for the inclusion of the socio-cultural norms prevalent in the setting from which our data has emerged.

Hedging: Existing Research

Much has been published on hedges and hedging from theoretical, empirical and applied

perspectives. In a thirty-year period, so much has been published on this interactional language feature that it has warranted various overview and review articles and volumes (Clemen 1997, and Schröder and Zimmer 1997, for example). Inevitably, with such publication density comes diversity and conflict and this will become more evident as our discussion unfolds. For present purposes, we have decided to review hedging in terms of definition, gender, culture, genre, psycho-affective aspects, and pedagogic application.

Throughout the research literature, hedges have eluded any widely-accepted definition. Fundamental to the problem of definition is the divergence in approach to the nature and realisation of hedging. Traditionally, hedges were considered to be semantic modifiers or approximators in the spirit of the original definition by Lakoff (1972:195), who coined the term 'hedge' to describe a word or phrase 'whose job it is to make things fuzzier or less fuzzy'. Lakoff is concerned with hedges in terms of the semantic contribution they make to the statements in which they occur (Loewenberg 1982:196), in that hedges can weaken or strengthen category membership. This is in keeping with Rosch (1978) who developed the prototype theory and views hedges as linguistic devices that modify prototypical category membership e.g. A penguin is *a kind of* bird. Such an approach is rooted in cognitive science where "semantic grasp" has preceded analysis at the level of discourse, and therefore discounts language function (Clemen 1997: 235).

Concurrent with this is the emergence of research which focuses on the pragmatic aspect of hedges in discourse. Within this approach, research questions focus more on *why* hedges are used and offer reasons such as politeness, indirectness, vagueness and understatement - to name

but a few. The work of Brown and Levinson (1978) on politeness strategies has provided a framework for investigating the role of hedging in domains such as mitigation and indirectness. In this approach, hedges are context- dependent and are integral to face saving strategies. Channell (1990), Clemen (1997), and Markannen and Schröder (1997) examine pragmatic strategies and their linguistic components in terms of hedges from various perspectives.

In addition to these approaches many researchers have attempted to reclassify and subcategorise what have traditionally been collectively called hedges. Prince et al. (1982) suggest that hedges should be divided into *shields* (those performing a pragmatic function) and *approximators* (those performing a semantic function) and Rounds (1982) adds *diffusers* to this. Hübler (1983) proposes *understatements* and *hedges* while Fraser (1975) examined in some detail *hedged performatives*, and Fraser (1980) differentiates between hedging and *mitigation.* Not surprisingly then, in the words of Markannen and Schröder (1997:15), "through extension the concept has lost some of its clarity and sometimes seems to have reached a state of definitional chaos, as it overlaps with several other concepts".

Gender has long been considered integral to the nature and use of hedges. Preisler (1986), following in the Lakoff (1975) tradition, maintains that women hedge more than men because their speech is more tentative and less assertive. However this viewpoint has become more contentious and much research based on real speech data has failed to support such conjecture (Bradac et al. 1995, Dixon and Foster 1997, and Holmes 1986, 1990, 1993). Lakoff's original proposals, based primarily on hypothesis and personal observation, have not only been challenged, but many findings now suggest that the contrary may in fact be true. As with many

areas of inquiry, evidence remains inconclusive on the effect of gender on the use of hedges. On the other hand, more recent work expands the sphere of investigation into the cultural constraints on the use of hedges, for example, Crismore et al. (1993) cross socio-cultural boarders by comparing the American and Finnish contexts. Hinkel's (1995) fascinating and innovative study examines the use of modals on a comparative and contrastive basis between native and non-native users of English in a written context and found that there are considerable socio-cultural constraints on the pragmatics associated with modality. Cultural values and norms also form a central tenet of our present study.

Several researchers have examined the effects that the use of hedges and intensifiers have on the listener in terms of features such as attractiveness, authority, credibility etc. Results are conflicting and not easy to compare due to dissimilarities in empirical procedures adopted by researchers such as Bradac et al (1995), Holmes (1990) and Hosman (1989). However, these studies are highly methodical in approach and comprehensive in nature. Furthermore, specific language domains have formed test-beds for how and why native speakers employ hedges. There has been considerable research into the use of hedges in academic texts (Myers 1989, 1992; Fahnestock 1986, Hyland 1994, 1996, Salager-Meyer 1994, and Rounds 1982). Another significant corpus-based study into the use of hedging in a professional spoken context is that of Prince et al. (1982). In their corpus of 12 hours of physician to physician talk they note that the most salient linguistic feature, in terms of frequency, is that of hedges. Using Lakoff's (1972: 195) definition a 'hedge' is a word or phrase 'whose job it is to make things fuzzier', they identified between 150 and 450 hedges per hour, more than one every fifteen seconds.

Some researchers address the practical application that their findings may have in pedagogic terms (Hinkel 1995, Holmes 1988, Markannen and Schröder 1997, and Skelton 1988). However, most of the publications engage at either a theoretical or descriptive level exclusively and it appears that much territory remains unexplored in relation to pedagogic implications and applications in foreign language teaching.

Data for this study

For the purposes of our analysis, we have isolated two sub-corpora of spoken data from a corpus of spoken and written Irish English currently under construction at the University of Limerick.[1] These two sub-corpora were selected because of our active engagement in their collection and our familiarity with them.

Sub-corpus A (RPI): 55,000 words of Radio Phone in conversations on *Liveline*[2] a national Irish radio programme on Radio Telifís Éireann.

Sub-corpus B (POTTI): 52,000 words of Post-Observation Teacher Trainee Interaction[3] - feedback on teaching practice which took place as part of the Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language programme at the University of Limerick.

Variation at the Level of Dialect

A striking feature of both the RPI and POTTI data is the pervasive use of the modal verb *would* as a hedging device. To quote some examples, "I would personally be of the view, others would disagree, a more tough-minded view would say, I would say". The starting point of our

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[1] The Limerick Corpus comprises over a million words of spoken and written contemporary Irish English.
[2] This data is supplied by A. O'Keeffe and research into *Liveline* is kindly sponsored by the Irish national broadcasting station Radio Telifís Éireann under their 1998 Doctoral Scholarship Award. Data is copyright to RTÉ.

investigation was to look at how such usages of *would* compared across three dialects of English. This helped to establish that there was an issue that needed further exploration. Due to restrictions in access to and availability of comparable corpora representing dialects of English this part of our investigation does not go beyond an illustrative stage. The frequency of a commonly occurring cluster: *I would say*, and its contracted form *I'd say,* was quantified across the Limerick Corpus [4], the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) and a corpus of American spoken data from the Cambridge International Corpus[5]. The search yielded the following results across Irish, British and American Corpora.

Table 1 – Inter-dialectal comparison (per million words)

Item	LC (Ir)	CANCODE (Br)	CIC (Am)
I would say	266	164	105
I'd say	177	159	108

This very superficial level of comparison merely served to verify that on a basic quantitative analysis, at dialectal level, the structures *I would say* and *I'd say* as hedges are used more frequently by Irish speakers than by our British or American counterparts. In fact, on the basis of the above results, Irish speakers seem to be twice as tentative, or *hedgy,* as American speakers. An inter-varietal exploration of one exponent of the interactional strategy of hedging, at what Biber et al. (1999) call a dialectal level, is restrictive in its insightfulness. The question of language variety is much more complex than that presented within a quantitative and geographically-constrained framework. This should by no means preclude looking at variation across geographical boarders, but for our present purposes of examining the hedging device

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[3] This data has been collected by F. Farr.
[4] The Limerick Corpus is broadly based on the framework outlined in McCarthy (1998: 8-12).
[5] Results from CANCODE and CIC are based on an oral presentation by Prof. Michael McCarthy, University of Limerick 1999.

would, numerical results such as these, do not further our understanding of how or why it is used in face-to-face interaction.   At a broader level, it could be argued that corpus-based research into how varieties of a language differ need to go beyond the level of lexis and syntax, and naturally-occurring language has much to offer by way of comparison at the level of discourse across language varieties.

Variation at the Level of Register

If we are to characterise the use of *would* in our data*,* we need to examine its situational distribution, that is to say, variation in spoken language is not only a by-product of place and history, it is also integral to context. We have chosen to adopt the term *register* for what Halliday (1978: 31-32) refers to as the "very simple and very powerful … fact that the language we speak or write varies according to the type of situation".   This term is strongly associated with Biber's research over the years (see especially: Biber 1995, 1998). In Table 2, we use the matrix for the major distinctions between the situational characteristics which distinguish registers from each other as outlined in Biber et al (1999: 15-17). We have added *spoken genre range,* which refers to the Bakhtinian notion of relatively stable units of talk where "each separate utterance is individual … but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types of utterances*" (Bakhtin 1986:60) (italics from original source). We use the term *spoken genre range* within the framework of Biber et al (1999:16) to refer to the finite range of expected generic talk units within each register. RPI and POTTI may be compared thus in *Table 2*.

Table 2 – The Identifying Characteristics of Situational Variation

RADIO PHONE IN	POST OBSERVATION TT INTERACTION
Register • *Mode*: Spoken: voice only	**Register** • *Mode*: Spoken: face to face

• *Interactive online production* – with a degree of advanced planning • *Shared immediate situation* – no – (shared society) • *Main communicative purpose/content*: good radio disclosure, entertainment • *Audience*: public within broadcast range, mainly Irish • *Dialect domain*: local • *Spoken Genre Range*: (diverse but finite) narrative, argumentative, expository, directive, opinion-giving/seeking.	• *Interactive online production* – with a degree of advanced planning • *Shared immediate situation* - a university office • *Main Communicative Purpose*: instructive/directive • *Audience:* individual • *Dialect domain:* local • *Spoken Genre Range*: (less diverse than RPI): directive, observation-comment, expository, reflection/self-direction, motivational.

With this comparison in mind, we can now move to quantify the occurrence and distribution of *would* in the corpora.

A Quantitative Analysis

An initial search of *would* in the RPI and POTTI registers yielded the results illustrated in *Table 3* below. The distribution of *would* from a quantitative perspective is strikingly similar, with RPI data producing 3930 occurrences, and POTTI data 3942 occurrences per million words. At this level of analysis, it seems that there may be nothing of significance or interest to note about the use of *would* as a hedge between these registers.

Table 3- 'Would' Across Registers

| RPI		POTTI	
Total no. of words	54,707	Total no. of words	51,754
Total hits for would per million words	3930	Total hits for would per million words	3942

Subsequent to this surface-level analysis, independent concordances were generated for each register. Repeated patterns, left and right of the node word *would,* which occurred more than twice in either register were isolated. Idiosyncratic repetitions and non-hedge uses of *would*

were excluded at this stage. Negative and contracted forms were further investigated, and all results were converted into 'words per million'. Where negatives or contractions are excluded from the tables below, there were no occurrences in either register. Three significant patterns emerged: (1) pronoun plus *would,* (2) questions with *would* (inverted and "wh-") and (3) *would* in verb phrase constructions.

1. Pronoun + *Would*

Back-stepping to a more general level the overall pronoun profile for the two registers was quantified. Results can be seen on the following table.

Table 4 - Pronoun Distribution across RPI and POTTI
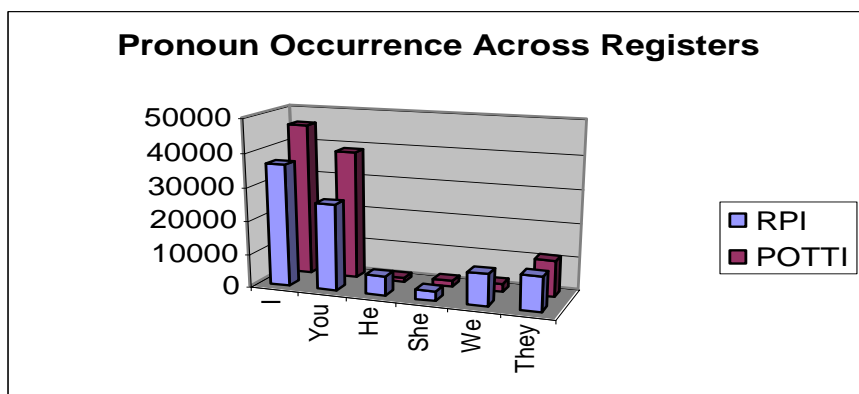
This is in line with the register characteristics as outlined in *Table* 2. The 'onlineness' and level of personal involvement is represented in the high results in the *I* and *you* domains, where the main communicative goals are achieved collaboratively within the dyads and within the respective spoken genre ranges. These results are very similar to the distribution of pronouns in conversation in general as represented in the findings of Biber et al (1999: 334). *Table 6* below shows the results for the distribution of pronoun plus *would* in our data.

Table 6 Pronoun + Would (A) (all results are per million words)

Item	RPI	POTTI
I would	1151	1024
You would (sing.)	73	213
You would (pl.)	0	0
You would (impers)	55	174
He would	91	0
She would	39	39
We would	91	77
They would	219	270

Proportionally, we find the first person singular most frequently co-occuring with the hedge *would,* this is in line with expectation within the speech genre range of these registers (expository, directive, and so on), that is to say, the speaker habitually seeks to downtone or make fuzzy when explaining, directing etc. in the first person. The nil result for the pronoun *he* in POTTI is explained by the female gender bias among the trainee and student cohorts. The result for impersonal *you,* especially in the POTTI data, and the result for *we,* are linked to the strategic use of 'other attribution' which we will return to at a later stage. Table 7 offers a further breakdown of hedged pronouns.

Table 7 – Pronoun + Would (B)

Item	RPI	POTTI
People would	54	77
It would	475	502
There would	91	0
This would	54	19
That would	128	231

These results again relate to how speakers distance themselves from the content of their utterance, for example:

Extract 1 (POTTI)

> **Trainer:** **Well now you see that is that would not be clear to me** when I look at this as a lesson plan+
>
> **Trainee:** Right.
>
> **Trainer:** +and see it as an aim **I thought** that you were going to look at **maybe** differences in eating in various cultures.

We see that the trainer has consciously changed the pronoun from *this* to *that* between her first and second turn. *That* can be used as a means of referring in a non-central, marginalised manner (McCarthy 1994), in other words, by using *that* the speaker seeks to put the criticism at a safe distance. In the speech genre of argumentation (see Extract 2 below), the caller uses *that would* as a subtle means of raising opposition or scepticism as if from a distance, whereas the direct implication of the caller's utterance is: *I don't agree with what you have said*.

Extract 2 (RPI)

> **Presenter:** ..I mean people are still getting married and they're getting married for all best of reasons and they're mad about one another and they want to live happily ever after.
>
> **Caller:** Yes. That **would** be the that **would** be the the pretty picture that's painted but as time goes on it's cool these days ah and pardon me for using that word because it's a slang word I don't like. But as they say it's cool to say "I'm separated". It's attractive.

Similarly in Extract 3, the trainer is trying to bring about self-direction. Her attempt at

elicitation fails and consequently her utterance *that would be* offers a palatable front for the implication that the trainee's answer was wrong. The more direct, face-threatening version would be: *No, that's at the correction stage*.

Extract 3 (POTTI)

> **Trainer:** … if you're not sure which words they're not going to know and which words they are going to know?
>
> **Trainee:** Ask them well like ask concept questions or something?
>
> **Trainer:** That **would** be at the correction stage but before they start to do the activity so you might not know for example that am oh excuse me that "cook" and "cooker" are going to be+

It is also worth noting that the high results for *I, they* and *it* plus *would,* in both registers, is in keeping with the findings of Luukka and Markkanen (1997), who say that this is representative of spoken interaction where levels of involvement with oneself, the audience and what is being talked about are high.

2. "Would" in Questions

Typical of institutional spoken registers is a high density of questions (Harris 1995). In our data, we note the frequency of second person singular questions which are hedged using *would*. *Table 8* illustrates the results for concordance searches of *would* + pronoun in questions.

Table 8 Inverted Questions

Item	RPI	POTTI
Would you *Significant reoccurrence*	292	541

within this:		
would you say	73	19
would you have	37	19
would you not get	37	0
would you prefer	0	58
would you talk	0	173
would you use	0	58
Would they	18	19
Would we	18	0

From the above table, *you, they* and *we* represent the pronoun domains which are hedged using *would* and they are reflective of the results for Pronoun + *would* in *Table 6* (apart from the obvious lack of *I* in questioning). *Table 9* shows the results for *Wh-* questions.

Table 9 Wh- questions

Item	RPI	POTTI
What would	37	155
How would	18	39
When would	0	39
Which would	0	59

These results characterise the marked contrast in the communicative goals of each register. In all cases, the POTTI data shows much higher frequencies. The use of *what would* underpins the importance of reasoning and rationalising in POTTI and *how would* indicates the essential place of methodological issues involved. *When* and *which would* suggest that temporality, precision and decisiveness are vital and clearly illustrate the necessity to make hard and fast choices.

Extract 4 (POTTI)

Here the trainer is trying to bring about trainee reflection.

Trainer:	Okay now if you had to change some general aspects of not necessarily of the lesson because I'm not sure how much of that you could change+
Trainee:	Mm.
Trainer:	+of either the lesson or your planning **what would** it be?
Trainee:	Am+

On the other hand the narrative speech genre within the RPI speech genre range does not involve hedged questioning using *what, when, how* and *which* - if such a question type is used, it functions to seek clarification, rather than validation or self-direction, and so on, from the story teller, and so it does not need to be hedged. Also, it is more incremental in RPI to use declarative questions, which function as formulations to be accepted or rejected, and these are frequently hedges, for example.

Extract 5 (RPI)

In an opinion giving unit, the Presenter offers the following formulation:

Presenter:	And **you would think** not all for the better?

Extract 6 (RPI)

Presenter:	**There would be** the smallest little bit of prejudice in that no?

3. Would in Verb Phrase Constructions

The following results were found in our investigation of how *would,* as a hedging device, co-selects certain verbs.

Table 10   Would + Verb

Item	RPI	POTTI
Would be	749	676
'd be	311	97

Would not be	37	39
Wouldn't be	73	77
TOTAL	**1170**	**889**
Would do	37	58
'd do	0	19
Wouldn't do	110	0
TOTAL	**147**	**77**
Would go	37	77
'd go	0	58
TOTAL	**37**	**135**
Would have	439	618
'd have	146	77
Wouldn't have	73	97
TOTAL	**658**	**792**
Would think	91	19
Wouldn't think	0	19
TOTAL	**91**	**38**
Would like	91	77
'd like	165	231
Wouldn't like	18	0
TOTAL	**274**	**308**
Would say	183	425
'd say	238	97
Wouldn't say	110	58
TOTAL	**531**	**580**
Would see	54	77
Wouldn't see	54	19
TOTAL	**108**	**96**
Would agree	91	19
TOTAL	**91**	**19**

Notable here in the *would + VERB* pattern is the absence of performative verbs relating to the modes of speaking within the range of the respective registers, especially, *advise, disagree, explain, argue.* The absence of these patterns is indicative of a non-directive stance taken up by the presenter in *Liveline*, where advice or explanation is sought from the listeners rather than from the presenter. Equally, arguments in RPI are very genial and subtle and the use of *I'd argue* in the whole corpus does not occur within an argumentative unit. In the case of POTTI, the absence of these hedged performatives is evidence of a desire to encourage reflection and self-direction rather than superimpose them.

At this point, we have explored to some degree the coligational and collocational patterns (after Sinclair 1996), of *would* as a hedge, and now we need to go beyond the numerical evidence to look at the wider context in pursuit of a global characterisation of how and why *would* is used so frequently as a hedging device in our data. Several integral factors will be considered.

Institutional Setting and Hedging

The Irish national broadcasting station, *Radio Telefís Éireann*, and an Irish university are the institutional settings from where the RPI and POTTI data originate respectively. These interactions are set within institutionally defining parameters. As is the case in any conversation, participants enter into a 'conversational contract' (after Fraser 1980:343) where each party brings an understanding of some set of rights and obligations vis à vis the other (See also Clark and Carlson 1982 refer to *the Principle of Responsibility* at a socio-cultural level, and Thomas 1983 who talks about pragmatic *ground rules*). Within institutional setting these rights, obligations and norms are fixed to a greater degree than in everyday conversation, and this is largely due to the institutionalised roles of the participants. Specific to this study are the roles of presenter and caller, and trainer and trainee. These exogenous roles are not symmetrical in terms of rights, obligations, and ultimately power. The presenter and the trainer, by virtue of role, are bestowed more power in the interaction. In the case of the presenter, the power semantic is, to a degree, less asymmetrical than in the case of the trainer-trainee dyad, because it is mitigated by the caller being the 'primary knower' (term adapted from Berry 1981) of his or her own experience, problem or opinion (O'Keeffe 1999). The trainer, on the other hand, is both the power role holder and the 'primary knower' in terms of professional expertise.

Would is used strategically within these institutional conditions on a relational or

interpersonal level to redress the asymmetry of the power semantic within the dyads, and on an transactional level to mitigate or downtone the perlocutionary force of the utterances in 'difficult' or threatening speech genre units, and to frame the focus of the talk into a safe hypothetical band.   These strategies are dealt with in greater detail in the following discussions.

<u>Maintaining a Solidarity-based Persona</u>

In both of these dyads, the power holders are very aware of establishing and maintaining their professional personas within a solidarity base rather than a power base. The radio presenter wishes to be perceived as the nation's friend and facilitator, and the trainer needs to ensure that she is perceived as someone who is collaborative, motivating and facilitative rather than someone who has the power to pass of fail a student on the basis of teaching performance. We can say, therefore, that both the presenter and the trainer are very aware of mitigating their role-related power for relational reasons. *Would* can function as a hedge at an interpersonal level to downtone at moments when the presenter or trainer feel their power needs to be played down. Typically, in the case of RPI, this occurs in questioning, where the presenter has superior role-related power to ask the questions and in POTTI, it frequently occurs in criticism/directive units. We reintroduce Extract 1 to see how *would* is used by the trainer to downtone the force of her criticism. It is well within her conversational right, and within the expected speech genre range, to give criticism, but for reasons thus elaborated, she uses various hedging devices to mitigate the perlocutionary force of the criticism and so plays down the institutionalised power associated with her role.

Extract 1 (POTTI)

     Trainer: Am is that what you meant by this?

Trainee: Am yes.

Trainer: **Well now you see that is that would not be clear to me** when **I**

        look at this as a lesson plan+

Trainee: Right.

Trainer: +and see it as an aim **I thought** that you were going to look at **maybe**

        differences in eating in various cultures.

In Extract 7 we see *would* used in questioning.

Extract 7 (RPI)

This call involves a distressed mother calling the show to seek advice on her son's new tattoo.

Presenter: And will you **would you** like to go **sort of** on a sun and sea holiday with

        him this year?

Caller: Not particularly he's involved in a lot of water sports and am I suppose

        that's where <sigh> people will see this tattoo and I just wonder what

        they'll think about it.

In both 1 and 9, one notices in the abrupt, or online, change of grammatical construction (anacoluthon) from *that is (not clear to me)* to *that would not be clear to me (POTTI)* and *will you would you (RPI).* We also find clustering of other hedging devices: *Well now, you see, maybe* also attribution is to the first person singular *to me, when I look, I thought* which provide a cushion or possibility that *I* could be wrong, *it's only what I perceive*. As mentioned earlier, we find the use of the pronoun *that (that would not be clear to me)* which again serves to attribute responsibility for the problem away from the trainee (see *other attribution* - Halliday and Hasan

1976, McCarthy 1994), *that* functions similarly in Extract 8 below ***that's*** *what the theory tells us* where we see a further strategic use of *would* by the power role holder.

Downtoning Knowledge-based Power

There are frequent examples where the trainer downplays knowledge-related power, for instance in Extract 8 below. The trainer alludes to what pedagogical theory tells *us* (solidarity alignment with the trainee - *us = all teachers*) rather than asserting what she knows as part of her professional expertise.

Extract 8 (POTTI)

Trainee:	Yeah but d'you think that was kind of that was appropriate?
Trainer:	Yeah yeah **I would think so** I I mean tha= **that's what the theory tells us that's what we spoke about yesterday in class**+
Trainer:	(6 turns later) **I would say so** yeah yeah I think so am yeah the just the organisation and the way you set up that activity wasn't quite as clear-cut as as it might have been+

Downtoning Threatening Speech Units

Another systematic use of *would*, at a transactional level, is found in the following extract from RPI. In this argumentative unit, *would* is used by the caller to downtone the force of her assertions. *Would* is also used by the presenter to pose opposition to these assertions. This is a very genial form of aurgumentation, typical of *Liveline*, where directness in opposition or skepticism-raising is avoided. Consistent with this is the use of other-attribution *they, most people worldwide, one million people in Northern Ireland* and so on.

Extract 9 (RPI)

Caller: In a subtle yes I know but within Article Two we're always said that our national territory was the whole island **I would think** most+

Presenter: Yeah but but it wasn't

Caller: +but I think **most people worldwide would** when **they would** say Ireland **they would** see see the whole island right? Now I think everybody be wo= **would** be aware that there's been a conflict on our island for a hell of a long time. But as as its territory I think most people **would would** define that the island as been the whole island.

Presenter: Well **one million people in Northern Ireland wouldn't**.

Caller: Oh yes I know isn't **that** the ongoing conflict?

The equivalent 'difficult' moments in POTTI are where direction is given, in other words, what *should* be done, or indeed what *should have been done* in the classroom. Systamatically, the trainer uses *would* where *should* is substitutable. We can say that in these instances, *should* is downtoned to *would*.

Extract 10 (POTTI)

Trainer: Now they are they are actually discussing things for purposes of fluency+

Trainee: Umhum.

Trainer: +so you **wouldn't** correct them+

Trainee: Right.

Trainer: +that normally **you'd** note the things that+

Extract 11 (POTTI)

Notice the use of *I* by the trainer to further mitigate the implied criticism (also in 12).

Trainer:	+it a good idea to leave them where they are?
Trainer:	It depends on what you're doing like ah for this oh if had finished this exercise **I would have have told them** they could go+

Extract 12 (POTTI)

Trainee:	But what way **would** I have like quickened up the correction and that?
Trainer:	No **I wouldn't** am <$E> pause two seconds </$E> the I mean you went through it word line by line+
Trainee:	Yeah.
Trainer:	+by you know and you asked the same question each time "have we"+
Trainee:	Yeah.
Trainer:	+"are there any mistakes in this line" but you just said "okay" **you would** start perhaps start the class by saying "okay we'll we'll go through this quite quickly because I have the="+

Transposing Face Threat into a Hypothetical 'Safe Band'

Many of the extracts hitherto cited could be interpreted as hypothetical. The power holder very often moves the topic into a hypothetical band, where face threat is removed, as such the speaker chooses the least threatening option on the pragmatic continuum (Givón 1984). We refer to this strategy as *transposing*. In the example below, the presenter is talking to a well known Irish barrister, she could ask a prototypical question: *Do you knowingly take spurious cases*?, but she

transposes this to the opposite end of the pragmatic continuum and asks *if you think a case is spurious would you take it?* This allows room for the caller to decide if he will elect to answer the question directly, from a personal stance, or from a professional or hypothetical stance. He chooses the latter (*every barrister, a lot of barristers*) and chooses to interpret the *you* in the presenter's question as generic.

Extract 12 RPI

Presenter: +if you think a a case is spurious **would** you take it?

Caller: Well I mean ah **the answer is yes every barrister** is obliged to take a case in an area in which he professes to be competent and he's not supposed to be say ''I just don't like the look of my client ah I won't take the case". But am if I'd I I think a **a lot of barristers** if they thought there was a genuine try on they **would** say well no foal no fee doesn't apply in this case.

Diversly in the following extract, the caller (a bishop) takes up a personal stance though he is given the option to give a general answer.

Extract 14 (RPI)

Presenter: Right. Ah uh **if you take the society that you would have grown up in+**

Caller: Um.

Presenter: +and **you take where we are now I mean there are quite remarkable differences.**

Caller: Yes oh absolutely yeah absolutely.

Presenter: And you **would** think not all for the better?

Caller: No **I think** it's always mixed **I think** it as you know in in one way it a very it's impossible to compare one one ah period with another because there are good points and bad points in what's happened but **I think** it's it's it's certainly different

This strategy frequently occurs in POTTI when the trainer seeks to initiate reflection on the part of the trainee, and self-criticism is safely transposed to the hypothetical band. Here is a typical example.

Extract 15 (POTTI)

Trainer: Yeah now what other instruction **would** you need ah?

Trainee: I should have told them that there were four words that **wouldn't** have been used that **would** not necessarily fit into the.

Hedging to downtown advice/direction seems to be a typical politness strategy in this register. It lends a theoretical and global significance to the advice. The unspecified human agent implies a wider application of the direction given (see Extract 16). Such a function is not as imperative in the context of RPI where the communicative purpose differs.

Extract 16 (POTTI)

Trainer: Am the whole all the time they were discussing ah again because we discussed this the you didn't have space to really monitor them but **normally you'd be able to monitor and**+

Trainee: Umhum.

Trainer: +**more closely and ah it would be needed** a variety of good dis= good

discussions don't just occur teacher stands back as far as possible but the

teacher is still+

Socio-cultural Norms and Hedging

The main data for this paper are not only defined by respective institutional settings and register

issues, they are also rooted in a socio-cultural context, that is to say, both sets of data are from

institutional settings *within* Irish society. It is accepted by many researchers that the linguistic

manifestations of hedging are not only complex but that the functions they express cannot be

identified in 'a social and textual vacuum' (Holmes 1990:186). In order to fully understand

hedging, we feel that socio-cultural context needs to be considered as one of critical factors in

explaining why speakers hedge in discourse. In Irish society, directness is very often avoided

and this is attested throughout our data. We suggest that 'forwardness', which ranges from being

direct to being self-promoting is not valued within Irish society. That our society does not place a

high value on powerful or direct speech is borne out by some of the above results for the use of

would as a means of downtoning the assertiveness and directness of how we interact. Let us

further consider the following extracts.

Extract 17 (POTTI)

Here the trainer is giving advice staged to the trainee on how a particular exercise should have

been conducted based on the trainee's performance in the classroom

Trainer: **Do you think it would have been possible at all** to **just** leave them work

through them all? <pause: two seconds> like it w= it was always going to

be a better idea to split up the sentences **was it**?

24

Trainee: **I would say so**.

Trainer: Mm.

Trainee: Given your time **I would say so**.

Trainer: Umhum.

Trainee: Yeah **maybe** not into such small sections maybe into just three different groups "can you work on the first two can you work on the fourth to the eighth can you work on the eighth to the twelfth"+

Extract 18 (RPI)

Here the topic is boarding schools. The caller phones the programme to talk about his memories of being at a boarding school.

Presenter: Did you find it wo= girls very alien beings when you came up in contact with them?

Caller: Well yeah I **would**. Ah yeah there was that sorry for the noise there there was that ah there was that element am I mean when I came to university first you know you're used to an all out male atmosphere so okay girls it's kind of wo= what's that creature over there is that a girl…

In the extract above, a notable feature common to the way Irish people interact is the indirectness in answering a polar question. Irish people will rarely answer a polar question with a single word answer (yes or no), it is considered too direct and impolite (Asián and McCullough 1998:49). This is consistent with the socio-cultual norm of avoiding over assertiveness. Very frequently in our data, we find that when speakers talk about themselves, they try to mitigate

directness by using *would* as an epistemic downtoner, even where the propositional content is undisputed.

Extract 19 (RPI)

> **Caller:** I told him he could have piercing I mean no problem any organ of the body he wanted anything you could undo but tattoos they frighten me and as regards that lady yeah **I would be really in sympathy** with **her I would be saying** "do you know what you're doing? Do you know who you are identifying yourself with?"

Extract 20 (RPI)

Here the caller was convicted of murdering her colleague in Saudi Arabia. After an extended period, she was released and cleared of the charge.

> **Presenter:** You figure you were stitched up?
>
> **Caller:** Oh yes very definitely.
>
> **Presenter:** Why?
>
> **Caller:** Am again ah **I would have many theories on this**.

We see that the caller expresses certainty in her agreement with the presenter's formulation, but in her next turn when it comes to asserting the reasons why, we find *would* is used to downtone the assertion. In extract 24, the topic is the problem of female facial hair. We find *would* used systematically by the caller to downtone new facts about the past and the present colour of her facial hair, on second mention it is notable that the fact is not hedged.

Extract 21 (RPI)

> **Caller:** …two years ago I discovered waxing+

Presenter:	Yeah.
Caller:	+and I thought it was brilliant the best thing ever. Now I get it done every about every two weeks and it takes longer to grow back and it's am brighter than it was. **I would have had black hair** you know **my hair would be brownish now** but **it was**+
Presenter:	Right.
Caller:	+**black** in the teenage years.

Consistent with these findings we find downtoning of fact in the POTTI data.

Extract 22 POTTI

| **Trainer:** | I live in ah I never know whether I live in west Clare or north Clare no I suppose I **would be** north Clare I live in Ennistymon. |
| **Trainee:** | Oh you're north. |

Conclusion

In order to explain the frequency and diversity of occurrence of *would* as a hedging device in our data, we have proposed a three-tier framework which is summarised in *Table 11*.

Table 11 – A Framework for comparing hedging across institutional settings in a sociocultural context

Level 1 – Register Variables
- *Mode*
- *Interactive online production*
- *Shared Immediate situation*
- *Main communicative purpose/content*
- *Audience*
- *Dialect domain*
- *Spoken Genre Range.*

Level 2 – Institutional Setting
- *Institution*
- *Institutional Role*
- *Institutional Power Semantic*

Level 3 – Society
- *Sociocultutal norms of interaction*

These levels can be considered cumulative - Level 1 is confined by Level 2 and Level 3. Equally, Level 2 is restricted by Level 3. In other words, our socio-cultural norms permeate how we interact in institutional settings, and in their turn, socio-cultural norms and institutional settings have a defining influence at the level of register as represented in *Table 12*. To fully understand *would* as a hedge in spoken interaction, we conclude that its profile needs to be characterised with all three levels in mind.

Table 12
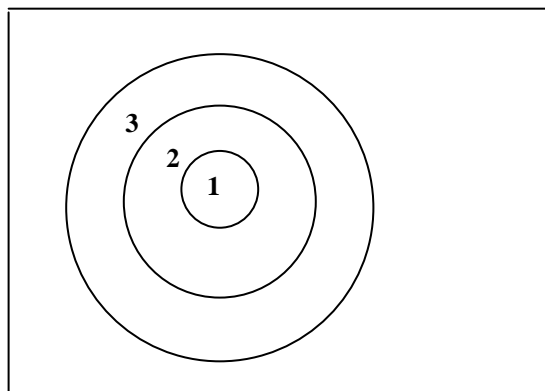
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